Light Cavalry Table X

Training a scout section in gunnery and other critical tasks

by Major Christopher D. Kolenda, Captain Raymond C. Zindell, and Staff Sergeant Mark A. Aide

For those of us accustomed to the tension, firepower, and drama of tank and Bradley gunnery, light cavalry gunnery — featuring .50-cal machine guns and MK-19 grenade launchers — can be a bit tiresome. Nevertheless, with a little imagination Light Cavalry Table X can be an exciting and demanding event that will pay huge dividends in enhancing the performance of light cavalry sections. This article outlines a way to get the most out of light cavalry gunnery and some lessons we learned that will increase the proficiency of light cavalry scouts.

The scout section is the base maneuver unit of any cavalry organization. As such, the focus of training must be at that level, rather than at the crew level. Since STRAC does not include a requirement to shoot section gunnery, we had to be a bit creative in allocating ammunition for the event while still meeting the standards for crew qualification. Furthermore, *FM 17-12-8, Light Cavalry Gunnery*, does not specify any standards for section gunnery, so we were starting from scratch. As we designed the training event, we wanted to focus on some critical tasks that we expect our scout sections to perform well. These tasks included dismounted patrolling, mounted reconnaissance, actions on contact, observation post occupation, call for fire, demolitions, and reporting. We also wanted to exercise our troop and squadron command posts, logistics, air-ground integration, and our indirect fire systems.

Event Design

Our Light Cavalry Table X was a demanding, 72-hour event. The section began the exercise in an assembly area with the section leader receiving an operations order. After conducting troop-leading procedures, the scout section executed a night dismounted reconnaissance patrol. The next day, the section conducted a mounted reconnaissance patrol, both day and night. On the third day, the section negotiated a day and night live-fire. The section had an after-action review after each event and a final AAR the morning after the night live-fire.

The dismounted reconnaissance patrol required the scout section to confirm or deny enemy presence in two Named Areas of Interest (NAIs). The patrol was approximately 2500m in length, and the section had four hours to complete the mission. The first NAI had no enemy presence; the second contained the squadron field trains. The order and the time constraint forced the section leader to conduct a thorough METT-T analysis to determine when his section needed to move rapidly and where he needed to invest time for a deliberate reconnaissance. The successful section leaders did the analysis and achieved reconnaissance results; the unsuccessful ones failed to reach the second objective in time.

The next day the sections conducted day and night mounted reconnaissance patrols. The lane was approximately 5kms in length. The sections had the mission to conduct a zone reconnaissance in four hours, with specified tasks to determine trafficability of a route and recon two NAIs, one of which was enroute while the other was at the limit of advance. The last NAI contained a suspected Motorized Rifle Platoon. Each lane featured an obstacle along the route that was overwatched by direct and indirect fire. The successful sections executed set-move and dismount drills at danger areas to standard, found the obstacle and the overwatch positions, then destroyed the enemy with indirect fire. The successful sections also planned enough time to place their vehicles in hide positions short of the last NAI and conducted a dismounted reconnaissance patrol to recon the MRP positions. As on the dismounted reconnaissance lane, the section leaders who conducted a thorough METT-T analysis and rehearsals had the best results. Embedded in each lane was time for a hotwash and re-run of each critical event. We found this method very beneficial. The sections had to conduct actions at the obstacle, NAI, and set-move and dismount drills to standard before continuing their mission. The sections then ran the same lane at night with a slightly different OPFOR set.

The last event was day and night live-fire. During the day, the scout sections conducted a zone reconnaissance, occupied an observation post, then displaced and gained contact with a CRP and FSE. During the zone reconnaissance, the scout sections engaged a DRT team, then encountered an obstacle overwatched by a BTR and dismounted troops. After destroying the vehicle and troops, the scouts called for smoke and breached the obstacle with a bangalore torpedo.

The sections continued their reconnaissance to their limit of advance, then occupied an observation post. At the observation post, the scouts called for and adjusted indirect fire, then engaged enemy dismounted troops with small arms, M203 grenade launchers and claymore mines. The sections then displaced, executed an abatis, and then set along a phase line to gain contact with the CRP and FSE. The sections reacted to a chemical attack, then engaged the FSE with indirect fire.

We had air scouts during several missions, which exercised the platoon leader's ability to coordinate the efforts of his scout sections and air scouts during the zone reconnaissance. On the night live-fire, the sections remained stationary and engaged enemy recon with direct and indirect fire. The design of this event was to hone the section's surveillance, target acquisition, actions on contact, and reporting skills.

We also had a robust observer controller package for Table X. Each section had an OC, and each platoon had a senior OC who conducted the formal AARs. We also had engineer OCs who ensured the scouts utilized the bangalore torpedo and demolitions for the abatis safely. The section OCs came from 2nd Squadron. The senior OCs

"A zone reconnaissance carries myriad implied tasks, such as reconning all lateral routes, key terrain, etc. If we fail to conduct a METT-T analysis and prioritize the efforts of the scouts, then they are likely to spend an inordinate amount of time on less important tasks."

were troop commanders and squadron staff officers.

The OCs evaluated the sections using score sheets that were specifically tied to reconnaissance results and proper execution of common tasks in order to eliminate the subjectivity often generated by TE&Os in the MTP manuals. For instance, the section earned points for submitting correct contact, spot, and obstacle reports. Each line of the report had points attached to it, and the section could earn full points only if the location was within 100m and the size of the enemy was at least 80% correct. The sections were also scored on tasks such as establishing the observation post to standard, call for fire, and emplacing the charges for the abatis.

Some Lessons Learned

Our Table X experience highlighted a number of lessons that are useful across the cavalry community.

- We had a commander's conference call at 0700 daily. The senior OCs reported on activities over the past 24 hours, sustains and improves for the sections, analysis of why the section performed as they did, the training focus for the next 24 hours (i.e., what specific tasks they wanted to see the sections improve), and issues with the training event overall. The squadron commander then outlined some specific areas upon which he wanted the OCs to focus.

The conference call was a high payoff event for us as it allowed us to discuss lessons, ideas, and TTPs that helped improve the performance of our sections throughout the training event. The payoff became even greater as the commanders had their platoon leaders eavesdrop on the conference call.

- The training event highlighted that we need to work on mission analysis at the section leader level. The best section leaders conducted a deliberate METT-T analysis, which enabled them to determine when they could increase the tempo of their reconnaissance, and when they needed to slow down and devote considerable amounts of time to the critical events, such as dismounted reconnaissance of NAIs. The thorough analysis also enabled the section leader to delegate tasks to his subordinates and generate concurrent rather than sequential activity.

For instance, the section had two hours to establish their OP on the day of live-fire. The best section leaders had delegated specific tasks to each member of the OP, and had also delegated abatis emplacement to another crew. These section leaders also identified the key events in each mission and rehearsed them thoroughly. They also explained the reasons behind their decisions so the subordinates could continue to perform in the absence of orders or when the section leader was killed or wounded. Unfortunately, only a handful of section leaders were at this level of proficiency.

- Table X also highlighted the age-old lesson of leadership from the front. A number of section leaders believed that their duty was to remain on the vehicle to send reports. As a result, they would send junior soldiers on dismounted patrols, to recon danger areas, or to establish the observation post. Such a technique was rarely successful. The best sections had the section leader out front on the patrols and at the observation post.

We tried to drive home several points here. First, the only purpose of the vehicles is to bring us rapidly to the next dismount point. Second, the most important thing happening for that section is forward with the dismounted patrol or the OP. In the case of 2 ACR, these scouts are the point men of the XVIII Airborne Corps. We cannot afford to send our junior soldiers alone and unafraid without leadership from the section sergeant. That NCO will be providing information that affects the troop, squadron, and regiment, and the most experienced soldier must be forward to make those critical assessments. Furthermore, a quick read of Grossman's *On Killing* or Ardant du Picq's *Battle Studies* reveals with stunning clarity human behavior in combat. Soldiers will only function in the face of the enemy when led from the front. The duty of the section leader is forward with his soldiers. The squad leader, or a smart driver armed with acetated report formats, can send reports to the platoon leader.

- Set-move drills improved significantly over the course of the exercise. Some sections had two vehicles moving simultaneously and paid the price at the obstacle. Deliberate set-move drills, when accompanied by dismount drills at danger areas, saved lives.

- Surveillance and target acquisition was another task that we needed to improve upon, across the board. Despite having thermal sights on the vehicles, a number of scouts elected not to use them and paid the price. Furthermore, several sections did not have a surveillance SOP to ensure 360-degree security, and missed several targets as a result. Furthermore, many sections did not use the MELIOS to its fullest capacity. When set in an overwatch position, the vehicle commander should lase TRPs to determine range for the gunner. This should also occur at the OP for the range cards on the M60 machine gun and M203.

- Another lesson that became apparent during the zone reconnaissance was the importance of clearly articulating the priorities of effort for scout platoons and scout sections. A zone reconnaissance carries myriad implied tasks, such as reconning all lateral routes, key terrain, etc. If we fail to conduct a METT-T analysis and prioritize the efforts of the scouts, then they are likely to spend an inordinate amount of time on less important tasks. Focusing their efforts will result in more time for a thorough reconnaissance of the areas the commander determines as most important.

- We experimented with liter ("smurf") rounds and found them to be a great asset. A liter round is a dummy artillery round that can be fired on most ranges and training areas. The fuse ignites on impact and gives off enough smoke to produce the visual effect of indirect fires. These rounds enable us to integrate indirect fires more effectively during training.

Continued on Page 49

Table X from Page 36

Cavalry Table X was a great training event for our squadron, and the methodology and insights we hope will be useful across the Armor and Cavalry community. Most importantly, the exercise highlighted once again the fundamentals of METT-T analysis, PCIs, rehearsals, battle drills, and noncommissioned officers leading from the front. The focus on scout sections, the fundamental maneuver unit in the squadron, and the level at which information is won or lost, also enabled the squadron leadership to get a first-hand assessment of the quality of training at that level.

MAJ Christopher D. Kolenda is currently the regimental S3, 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment, after serving as the S3 of 3rd Squadron. A 1987 graduate of the Military Academy, his assignments include tank platoon leader, scout platoon leader, and troop XO in 3rd Squadron, 11th ACR. After the Advanced Course, he was the squadron motor officer of 1-7 Cavalry, then commander of A Troop, 1-7 Cavalry at Fort Hood, Texas. He holds a Master's Degree in History from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and taught History at the United States Military Academy.

CPT Raymond C. Zindell is commander, K Troop, 3/2 ACR, after recently serving as the assistant S3 of the squadron. He is a 1995 graduate of Gannon University in Erie, Pa., with a BA in Criminal Justice. His assignments include tank platoon, task force scout platoon leader, and battalion liaison officer for 1st Battalion, 63rd Armor in Vilseck, Germany.

SSG Mark A. Aide is the senior small group instructor for 1st Platoon, 19D BNCOC at Fort Knox, Ky. He recently was the master gunner of 3/2 ACR. He served in Desert Storm with HHT, 1st Squadron, 4th Armored Cavalry (Division Cavalry) out of Ft. Riley; as a section sergeant with B Troop, 3rd Squadron, 4th Armored Cavalry (Division Cavalry) in Schweinfurt, Germany; and as a section sergeant and platoon sergeant with I Troop, 3rd Squadron, 2nd ACR at Ft. Polk.